



VII

OUR Teacher RIDES THE SPITTING CAMEL

Our Teacher stood in the plaza outside the Cairo Bazaar. Across the way, he spotted a one-humped camel with a leather saddle on his back.

“Could that be the Spitting Camel we’re looking for, MD?”

As he spoke, the camel lifted his head. Out of his wide smiling mouth shot a gob of spit. It flew in a long arch before smacking the stone pavement.

“Ruff! Ruff!” went MD.

“Yep, that’s the Spitting Camel all right,” Our Teacher said.

Here is the Spitting Camel Our Teacher saw:



The boy and beagle walked over to where the beast stood.

The camel turned his head. He blinked his large round eyes and said, "Good day, young gentleman."

MD sniffed the camel's chunky hooves.

"Yes, it is a good day," Our Teacher said. "But it almost wasn't. The Bazaar Cat led us into danger."

The camel spat again. "I've watched that nasty cat lead many visitors into the bazaar. They exit looking sad because they've been robbed."

"Lucky, I have a good memory, and MD has a good nose," said Our Teacher. "Together we were able to escape."

The camel let out another gob of spit just missing MD. "So, what can I do for you, young gentleman?"

"I'm searching for the Thinking Cap. The Pole-to-Pole Express conductor said you could help me find it."

"I can," said the camel. "Only this morning I spotted the Thinking Cap in a shop near the Great Pyramids of Giza."

"The Great Pyramids!" said Our Teacher, who knew a lot about ancient Egypt. "Oh, I'd love to see the pyramids. How do I get to Giza?"

The camel spat against the wall. "Hop onto my saddle. I was just returning there to give rides to visitors. They love to take selfies while sitting in my saddle with a pyramid in the background."

Our Teacher looked up at the camel's saddle high above his head. "But how do I get up there?"

"The ladder, young gentleman," said the camel. "Use the ladder."

Our Teacher grabbed a wooden ladder off the ground and leaned it against the camel's side. Holding MD in one arm, he climbed up to the saddle. He placed the dog in front of him and kicked the ladder away.

"All set," he said.

"By road, the Great Pyramids are five miles away," the camel said. "But I know a shortcut. through the desert."

The camel left the plaza. He cut through a neighborhood of mud-brick houses and came out onto an open desert. The view ahead offered nothing but sand dunes and drifting sand.

Our Teacher placed a hand before his mouth to keep out the desert dust.

"I feel like a nomad riding across the Sahara Desert," he said.

"*Ruff! Ruff!*" went MD.

"And you don't even have a camera to take a selfie," said the camel.

As the Spitting Camel lumbered up a dune, Our Teacher asked him, "So what does the Thinking Cap look like? No one has told me."

"It's a funny looking hat, young gentleman," the camel said. "Imagine a black beanie with a black square fixed to the top. A silver tassel hangs down one side."

"Sounds like a mortarboard," Our Teacher said. "Students wear mortarboards when they graduate."

"Many copies of the Thinking Cap have been made," said the camel. "But the one I saw this morning is the real thing."

"But how can you be sure? Did you see anyone put it on?"

"I did. I saw a small Egyptian girl wearing the hat," said the camel. "A short while later, she turned toward her parents and begged for some building blocks. She wanted to build a structure as grand as the Great Pyramid of Cheops."

Our Teacher laughed. "Her calling must be to become a civil engineer, a builder of skyscrapers and bridges. She probably didn't even know she had put on the magical cap."

"The next time I passed the shop, a little boy had on the cap," said the camel. "Soon afterward, he asked his parents for some clay. He wished to make a statue like the Great Sphinx."

"That's more proof the Thinking Cap works," Our Teacher said. "I bet the boy had learned his hidden talent was sculpting. He was meant to be an artist."

From the top of the dune, Our Teacher saw the three Giza pyramids poking up from the distant desert. As the Spitting Camel crossed the sand, they grew taller and taller. When the camel reached Giza, he took his riders on a tour around the tall pointy structures

As Our Teacher passed the tallest pyramid, he said, "The Great Pyramid of Cheops is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was built around 2560 BC as a tomb for the Pharaoh Khufu."

The Spitting Camel let go a great gob of spit. "Yes, yes, I know, young gentleman. For twenty years I've carried visitors around these pyramids. For twenty years I've listened to visitor guides talk about pyramid trivia."

After visiting the Great Sphinx, the camel took Our Teacher and MD to a row of souvenir shops. He stopped by a shop selling T-shirts and sun hats.

"Here's where I spotted the Thinking Cap this morning," he said.

"But I don't see it," Our Teacher said. "None of the hats look anything like a mortarboard."

Inside the shop sat a man wearing a long white gown. The camel talked to him in Arabic, and he gave a long reply.

"What's wrong?" asked Our Teacher. "Where's the Thinking Cap?"

"Bad news, young gentleman. This man sold the hat a few hours ago."

"Sold it? To whom?"

"An elderly Australian couple bought it." The camel paused to spit. "The shop owner said it was a gift for their grandson."

Our Teacher hung his head. "Another close call. Again, I was one step from finding that hat."

The camel talked to the merchant some more.

"Good news, young gentleman," he said. "This man knows where the couple is traveling to next. Athens, Greece."

"What did the people look like?"

"They wore straw hats and put the Thinking Cap in a blue backpack. They were heavy set, very round. They would be easy to pick out in a crowd."

"So how can I get to Greece?" Our Teacher asked.

The camel spat in the sand. "I admire your stamina and persistence, young gentleman. You're like a camel. You can sail to Greece on the Fast Ferry. It will take you down the Nile River and across the Mediterranean Sea in minutes."

"Then off to Athens we go," said Our Teacher. "I can't give up my search now."

"By road, the Nile River is five miles from here," said the camel. "But I know a shortcut."

Our Teacher took one last look at the Great Pyramids of Giza. Then holding MD with one hand and the saddle with the other, he rode the Spitting Camel down a dusty road toward the Nile River.